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STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
USCINCENT MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO FOR ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [IS](#) [KMDR](#) [MEDIA](#) [REACTION](#) [REPORT](#)

SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

- [1](#). Secretary Rice's "Transformational Diplomacy" Plan
- [2](#). Iran: Nuclear Program
- [3](#). Mideast

Key stories in the media:

Israel Radio reported that A/S David Welch will visit Israel during the weekend and meet with Acting PM Ehud Olmert on Sunday.

Yediot, Maariv, Israel Radio, and other media reported that on Thursday, Olmert called Jordan's King Abdullah II and told him that comments made on Wednesday by O/C Central Command Maj. Gen. Yair Naveh, who questioned the durability of the Jordanian monarchy, do not represent Israel's view. Yediot reported that the King told Olmert that he knows this. Maariv and Israel Radio reported that the two leaders agreed to meet after the Israeli elections.

In its lead story, Maariv quoted Khaled Mashal, the head of Hamas's political bureau, as saying in an interview with Zuhair Andrawus, the Editor-in-Chief of the Israeli-Arab newspaper Kul Al-Arab, that his organization is not afraid of Israel, that the truce with Israel is no longer relevant, and that the first assignment of the new Palestinian government will be to release the murderers of Israeli cabinet ministers Rehavam Zeevi. Ha'aretz quoted Mashal as saying in an interview with the Nazareth-based radio A-Shams that Hamas is willing to hold talks with the U.S. and any other country except Israel. Maariv reported that the Jordanian authorities clarified to Mashal that he would have to renounce his Jordanian citizenship if he wants to visit their country.

Ha'aretz reported that Hamas activists are providing assistance to militants from other groups -- mostly Islamic Jihad activists, activists from Fatah's Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, and members of local factions such as the Popular Resistance Committees -- who launch Qassam rockets at Israel from the Gaza Strip. Israel Radio reported that last night, two Palestinians were killed and another arrested at the Kissufim crossing near the central Gaza Strip. The radio said that they might have been trying to lay explosives charges. Israel Radio reported an Israeli air-strike on a car in Beit Hanoun in the northern Gaza Strip, and quoted Palestinian sources as saying that two Palestinians were injured in the attack. Ha'aretz, Yediot, and The Jerusalem Post reported that in total, five Palestinians, including four wanted men, were killed in clashes with IDF troops in Nablus on Thursday. Ha'aretz reported that Ismail Haniyeh, the Hamas leader whom PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas nominated for premiership, condemned the IDF operation in Nablus, saying that the "massacre must be stopped." Hatzofe quoted Haniyeh as saying that Palestinian blood is being spilled as part of the Israeli elections. Yediot

quoted former Shin Bet Director Avi Dichter as saying that Haniyeh is a legitimate target for assassination.

The Jerusalem Post reported that voices are being raised in the Quartet, arguing that the cutoff date by which Hamas must accept certain preconditions or face international isolation is "malleable" and not necessarily the day a Hamas government is formed. Meretz-Yahad Chairman Yossi Beilin was quoted as saying in an interview with The Jerusalem Post that Abbas might yet save Israel from "Hamastan."

Maariv reported that the IDF plan creating separate roads for Israelis and Palestinians in the West Bank is close to fruition.

Maariv (Ben Caspit) reported on a meeting held in Washington in early February between Jordan's King Abdullah and Vice President Dick Cheney. The newspaper quoted indirect sources as saying that the Jordanians were surprised by remarks made by members of Cheney's staff who attacked Abbas, calling him a "broken reed." The newspaper further reported that the Americans expressed satisfaction over Hamas's victory and noted that this only strengthened their view that the Palestinians should be left alone and that Israel should "take care of them."

Ha'aretz quoted U.S. Ambassador to Israel Richard Jones as saying on Thursday at a meeting with the Israel-America Chamber of Commerce that the U.S. expects Israel to improve its policies in the fields of standards, intellectual property rights, and government tenders. The newspaper also reported that the Ambassador called on Israel to deepen trade with the U.S. through completing trade liberalization and lifting non-customs trade barriers. Ha'aretz cited Jones' assessment that improvement in Israel's economic strength in recent years allows it to cope with challenges such as the rise of Hamas, and that its economy is on the way to full recovery.

The Jerusalem Post quoted Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri as saying that on Thursday, Hamas made an offer to former PA finance minister Salam Fayed to join its new cabinet.

Yediot quoted Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice as saying in Beirut that Syria should stop frightening Lebanon. Israel Radio reported that in Abu Dhabi, the Secretary and foreign ministers of the Persian Gulf

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Cooperation Council voiced fears over nuclear proliferation in the Persian Gulf region.

Yediot reported that in a phone conversation on Thursday, Olmert and Turkish PM Recep Tayyip Erdogan reaffirmed the friendly connection between their two countries.

The Jerusalem Post reported that on Thursday, the High Court of Justice decided to issue an interim injunction halting for 30 days construction of the Simon Wiesenthal Center-affiliated Museum of Tolerance being built over a Muslim cemetery in Jerusalem's Independence Park.

Based on the results of a Smith Institute poll conducted for The Jerusalem Post, the newspaper concluded that Israelis are "uninspired" by all three candidates for the premiership (Olmert, Binyamin Netanyahu, and Amir Peretz).

All media reported that on Thursday, Olmert approved a series of measures to reduce social gaps, including the creation of "negative income tax." Yediot bannered: "Olmert's Election Economics."

Ha'aretz and Yediot reported that on Wednesday, the Jerusalem police arrested a 32-year-old immigrant from the U.S., who resides in Beit Shemesh (a city west of Jerusalem, inside the Green Line), under suspicion of having brought to Israel over the past two months weapon parts, ammunition, and military equipment. Yediot quoted the suspect as saying: "I wanted to protect my family. In the past, I served in the U.S. Army in Iraq." Yediot wrote that he apparently does not belong to an extremist organization.

Ha'aretz cited recently declassified USG documents that shed light on the Nixon administration's attitude in the wake of the 1972 Munich Olympics massacre of Israeli athletes.

Ha'aretz reported that a high-level meeting of Knesset

members, world Jewish leaders, and academics was held at the residence of Israeli President Moshe Katsav on Thursday to discuss ways of increasing Diaspora Jewry's connection to Israel. The newspaper wrote that American Jewish leaders sharply criticized a proposal by Professor Yedidya Stern and other senior Israeli figures to seek U.S. federal government support for private Jewish schools.

All media reported that on Thursday, French President Jacques Chirac, his wife Bernadette, and French PM Dominique de Villepin, attended a memorial evening at Paris' Grand Synagogue for Ilan Halimi, the 23-year-old Jewish Frenchman who was kidnapped, tortured, and murdered by a Muslim gang. The lead suspect in the killing was arrested in the Ivory Coast.

All media (lead story in Globes) reported that on Thursday, the High Court of Justice rejected El Al's appeal against Israir's designated carrier status on the Tel Aviv-New York line. The decision effectively opens the skies to competition, and Israir is preparing for the immediate operation of its fixed line to New York, becoming the first Israeli airline to compete with El Al on that lucrative route. The media assessed that the fares of Israir's scheduled flights would be lower by 10 to 15 percent than the current fares, with return tickets on the line costing USD 600 to 1,000.

A Yediot/Mina Zemach (Dahaf Institute) poll held late this week shows that the popularity of the Labor Party and the Likud has become almost even:

- "Were elections for the Knesset held today, for whom would you vote?" (Results in Knesset seats -- in brackets, results of last week's poll.)
- Kadima 39 (41); Labor Party 19 (20); Likud 16 (15); Shas 10 (10); Yisrael Beiteinu 9 (7); Arab parties 9 (9); National Union-National Religious Party 8 (8); United Torah Judaism 5 (5); Meretz 5 (5); "floating mandates": 12 (14).

1. Secretary Rice's "Transformational Diplomacy" Plan:

Summary:

Washington correspondent Nathan Guttman wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "[Secretary Rice's 'transformational diplomacy' plan enjoys] the President's support and is considered an attempt to deal with the question America has been struggling with for more than four years now: 'Why do they hate us?'"

Block Quotes:

"Showdown at the State Department"

Washington correspondent Nathan Guttman wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (February 24): "Critics of public diplomacy say it is a euphemism for propaganda, but the events of the past years demonstrate that no matter what you call it, the U.S. needs to deal with the fact that it is not understood and is widely disliked in much of the world.... As is often the case with overwhelming reform programs, big plans can't always contend with realities on the ground; so it remains to be seen what parts of this one [Secretary Rice's 'Transformational Diplomacy'] will actually be implemented. Still, it does enjoy the President's support and is considered an attempt to deal with the question America has been struggling with for more than four years now: 'Why do they hate us?' Where the Middle East is concerned, the plan signifies a change in attitude, not in policy. Its call for many more Middle East specialists and Arabic speakers in the Foreign Service and for greater openness to the people will not affect American policy in terms of the region's conflicts. But it might help ease some of the tension -- something that's always seen as a positive step in the Middle East."

2. Iran: Nuclear Program:

Summary:

Editorial Page Editor Saul Singer wrote in the

conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "The Bush team's goal should be to either have won, or be clearly winning, against Iran 18 months from now."

Senior columnist and chief defense commentator Zeev Schiff wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "Had the Shah of Iran tried to develop nuclear weapons, Israel would not have been pleased, but its reaction would, no doubt, have been entirely different."

Block Quotes:

I. "Those Jihadi Grins"

Editorial Page Editor Saul Singer wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (February 24): "A mindset ... has sunk deep roots in Washington. This thinking holds that America can only do one thing at a time, and that thing is to consolidate democracy in Iraq.... This muddling mindset must be replaced, if Republicans want to hold on to the Presidency and if George Bush does not want to leave office with the jihadis ascendant. The 'must-win' attitude toward Iraq should be extended to Iran, where winning is defined as the fall of the Iranian regime or, at least, complete Iranian capitulation on the nuclear and terrorism issues, as Qadhafi did in Libya. The Bush team's goal should be to either have won, or be clearly winning, against Iran 18 months from now: those jihad grins should be gone."

II. "A Loose Cannon in Tehran"

Senior columnist and chief defense commentator Zeev Schiff wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (February 24): "After the crude declarations by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad about the Holocaust and the need for wiping Israel off the map, one of Israel's intelligence chiefs said wryly: 'We've succeeded. Our best candidate was elected president of Iran.' Indeed, there has been no factor more inimical recently to Iran in Western public opinion than Ahmadinejad's statements. He has provided additional proof of the danger of a nuclear Iran.... From Israel's perspective, it makes no difference what exactly Ahmadinejad's motives have been. What is crucial is such a person is liable to have his finger on the trigger of nuclear weaponry in a religious, fanatic country. This regime makes declarations that have not been heard since Hitler's era. Had the Shah of Iran tried to develop nuclear weapons, Israel would not have been pleased, but its reaction would, no doubt, have been entirely different."

13. Mideast: -----

Summary:

Senior editor Rafi Mann wrote in an editorial of popular, pluralist Maariv: "While Europeans can't be considered a bunch of leftist Israel-haters, Washington isn't a goody-goody or absolutely wise."

Liberal columnist and Hebrew University Prof. of Political Science Zeev Sternhell wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "Hamas is now facing off against an Israeli government that differs from that of the Likud only in its outward appearance, but not in its essential values and nature."

Conservative columnist Nadav Haetzni wrote in Maariv: "as the new heads of the PA even refuse to recognize the agreements that are the source for their rule, we are entitled to cancel them."

Block Quotes:

I. "America' Mistakes in the Middle East"

Senior editor Rafi Mann wrote in an editorial of popular, pluralist Maariv (February 24): "While Europeans can't be considered a bunch of leftist Israel-haters, Washington isn't a goody-goody or absolutely wise. Energetically aided by Natan Sharansky, the new American Right pulled George Bush straight into a quagmire called 'fight for democracy.' Not only have 2,280 U.S. soldiers (as of Wednesday) paid that mistake with their lives, put the entire world was made to pay for it: had Washington not spoiled its might in vain over Baghdad, it would have been able to act against

the threat of the Iranian atom. By the way, that mistake is not exclusively that of right-wing administrations: Jimmy Carter pressured the Iranian Shah to improve his human rights record -- thus only accelerating the fall of his regime and Khomeini's rise."

II. "Politics Without Principles"

Liberal columnist Hebrew University Prof. of Political Science Zeev Sternhell wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (February 24): "Just as Menachem Begin uprooted settlements in Sinai and made peace with Egypt for the sake of a Greater Land of Israel, and for the sake of peace with the United States, Sharon liquidated the settlements of the Gaza Strip to guarantee himself freedom of movement in the West Bank and to placate America, which he needed to handle Iran.... So it happened that Hamas is now facing off against an Israeli government that differs from that of the Likud only in its outward appearance, but not in its essential values and nature. It is ruled by the same blindness with which the right, and all varieties thereof, has always excelled.... How will the 30 million people living between the Jordan River and the Tel Aviv coastline by the year 2050 live if we do not reach a peaceful settlement and cooperation with the Palestinians? This is not a question that [security-minded Kadima politicians] are wont to address, and most certainly not on the eve of elections."

III. "Facing the Reality of Hamas"

Conservative columnist Nadav Haetzni wrote in Maariv (February 24): "The Palestinian people's new murderous choice can serve Israel well -- if only we stop deluding ourselves, formally annul the Oslo Accords, and put an end to the existence of the Palestinian Authority. Particularly now, as the new heads of the PA even refuse to recognize the agreements that are the source for their rule, we are entitled to cancel them. Those who say that this isn't realistic are invited to visit the cemeteries and the rehabilitation wars so they can check the reality of the continuation of the Oslo conception."

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